

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PANAMA 04355 182241Z

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 4355

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PN, PINT, PFOR

SUBJ: CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS: IMPLICATIONS OF SUCRE'S
RESIGNATION

SUMMARY: DURING CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFFS JULY 18, ARCHBISHOP
MARCOS MCGRATH SUGGESTED THAT VICE PRESIDENT ARTURO SUCRE'S
RESIGNATION WAS LINKED -- AS WAS EX-FOREIGN MINISTER TACK'S
DEMOTION -- TO HIS OPPOSITION TO COMPROMISE IN TREATY
NEGOTIATIONS. MCGRATH, WHO HAD MET JULY 17 WITH TORRIJOS, SAID
LATTER WAS DISPOSED TO BE PATIENT WITH USG WHILE DECISIONS
WERE BEING MADE. WE BELIEVE IT STILL IS PREMATURE TO CONCLUDE
THAT SUCRE'S DEMISE WAS LINKED TO CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS.
RUMORS OF HIS POSSIBLE INVOLVEMENT IN CORRUPTION ARE ALSO
CIRCULATING -- ALTHOUGH SOME SOURCES BELIEVE IT DOUBTFUL THAT
CORRUPTION ALONE WAS BASIS FOR HIS OUSTER. END SUMMARY.

1. SOURCES WITH WHOM EMBOFFS HAVE DISCUSSED RESIGNATION OF VICE
PRESIDENT ARTURO SUCRE ARE CONVINCED SUCRE WAS FORCED TO
RESIGN, BUT SOME DIFFERENCES EXIST AS TO REASONS. SOME ALLEGE
THAT HE WAS INVOLVED IN CORRUPT PRACTICES AND WAS FIRED FOR THAT
REASON. ANOTHER VIEW, SUGGESTED TO EMBOFFS BY ARCHBISHOP MARCOS
MCGRATH IN CONVERSATION JULY 18 WAT THAT SUCRE'S REMOVAL FROM
OFFICE WAS LINKED TO HIS MAINTENANCE OF HARDLINE POSITION IN
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PAGE 02 PANAMA 04355 182241Z

THE CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS. MCGRATH SAID EX-FOREIGN MINISTER

TACK HAD ALSO ARGUED FOR HARDLINE POSITION AND HIS DEMOTION HAD BEEN FOR SAME REASON. FOR EXAMPLE, SAID MCGRATH, WHILE TACK AND SUCRE WOULD HAVE INSISTED THAT US BE PERMITTED NO MILITARY BASES IN PANAMA UNDER A NEW CANAL TREATY, TORRIJOS WOULD HAVE SAID "WE WOULD PREFER THAT THERE BE NO BASES, BUT WE CAN'T GET THAT." MCGRATH SPECULATED THAT THE CHANGES SIGNAL A MODERATION IN PANAMA'S NEGOTIATING POSITION.

2. MCGRATH HAD MET WITH TORRIJOS FOR A LONG TALK ON JULY 17 BUT DID NOT SAY OR INFER THAT TORRIJOS HAD COMMENTED DIRECTLY ON THE REASONS FOR SUCRE'S OR TACK'S REMOVAL FROM THEIR PREVIOUS POSITIONS. HE DID SAY THAT TORRIJOS HAD COMMENTED THAT THE USG DECISION-MAKING PROCESS WAS VERY COMPLEX AND INVOLVED MANY DIFFERENT FACTORS, "NOT LIKE THE HOLY TRINITY--THREE PERSONS BUT ONE GOD". MCGRATH SAID TORRIJOS WAS DISPOSED TO BE PATIENT WHILE THE USG WAS MAKING UP ITS MIND ON ITS NEGOTIATING POSITION.

3. COMMENT: EXCEPT THAT IT IS CLEAR SUCRE'S RESIGNATION WAS NOT DUE TO ILL HEALTH ALONE, WE ARE NOT YET CERTAIN WHICH OF THE EXPLANATIONS NOW CIRCULATING ARE CORRECT. OFFICIALS WHO COULD SHED SOME LIGHT ON THIS QUESTION HAVE BEEN TIED UP WITH NACR MEETING AND THEREFORE UNAVAILABLE. WE HAVE KNOWN THAT PRESIDENT LAKAS HAD GREAT PERSONAL ANTI-PATHY FOR SUCRE BUT PREVIOUSLY THIS HAD NOT BEEN SUFFICIENT REASON FOR GETTING RID OF HIM.
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